Greensboro, N.C.
News
JUL 15 1961
Approved For Release 2005/01/05 : CIA-RDP75-00149R000700180018-0
M 99,675
SUNDAY 102,029

Ag 2
X Cuba
X Pers 3 W. SARGENT

The Pavlovian Reaction

A bare two weeks ago, the looming crisis in Berlin was at center stage, like some arm-flailing demagogue directing the bellows of the mob beneath the rostrum—and as if on his own timetable. Today there is a strange lull, another pause from the tightening and relaxing bind of the cold war.

This pattern is disturbingly familiar. U. S. reaction to the waxing and waning pressures of the cold war alternates regularly between frenzy and torpor, scurry and bone-tired relaxation.

This phenomenon—American reaction to Soviet initiative—was never more disturbing, really, than when the Soviets mounted their air show the other day. It appeared that the Soviet emphasis on manned bombers was heavier than American defense planners had thought. Immediately outcries broke over Congress that the Pentagon's own bomber program, sidetracked only recently when the B-70 program was curtailed, must be reinstated. Similarly when Khrushchev recently announced that he had halted the slices in ground troop strength that marked his most recent budgets, the reply in Washington was a reflex rumor that the National Guard and the reserves might be mobilized.

Perhaps, in the search for arms parity, Washington must always simply react to the shifts in Soviet arms priority—as on a chessboard a piece moved at one far corner may change the relationships on the whole board and force a move at the opposite far corner.

Still, the sudden reactions are disturbing. They suggest confusion. One may ask whether the changes in Russian priorities—not to speak of their recurrent emphasis of certain global hot spots—are really so capricious, so much without long-term rhyme or reason, that they cannot be predicted and accounted for in advance.

In the case of arms it may be reasonable to think so. In the case of global strategy, which gives rise to the sleight-of-hand with arms budgets, it is not. It should have come as no surprise, surely, when Khrushchev with mounting wrath told President Kennedy in Vienna that Berlin is a "bone in my throat" and must be removed. Khrushchev has said as much since 1958, at the latest. And though a decade has elapsed since the Berlin airlift, the acts that required it suggested that the Russian bear has had his claws trimmed all along to swat at Berlin.

And let's take two hypothetical cases.

What is in store in Asia, once the [illegible] flurries over Laos and South Vietnam subside, as indeed they now have, to the back page deep freeze? Will it be the turn of the Red Chinese to shell the offshore islands in the Formosa straits again? And will the United States immediately begin to scramble and confer and issue "stand fast" declarations as in 1955 and again barely three years ago? And what of Castro's Cuba? One would think it had become as obscure and unimportant as Monaco—but just because there is general agreement in this country that the CIA-sponsored raid in April was doubly bad, both poorly planned and of dubious legality, does that make Castro's shipment of Red arms in July any less menacing? Or does it really matter?

Of course there is a limit to the durability of a sense of crisis, and Washington may be as confused as the public. Perhaps it is of the nature of policy in a cold war to behave like a runaway stock market mingling bulls and bears—where every idle rumor floating over the iron curtain has the effect of a hot tip—sending the brokers of policy trundling off through the tangles of tickertape to sell ground troops and buy bombers, or sell bombers and buy missiles, or sell containment and buy guerrilla warfare.

But there is inconstancy here, as well as uncertainty, shameful dancing beneath the Soviet pistol-slinger as well as natural adjustment to shifts of cold war emphasis. And it must be asked how long a sane society can tolerate these fluctuations without losing its bearings.

The question was asked in an arresting way a year or so ago, when Dr. William Sargent, an English psychiatrist, mused on the implications of the U-2 affair. Mr. Khrushchev's noisy destruction of the summit was in such violent contrast to the bogus "spirit of Camp David" that Dr. Sargent was led to speculate that Russian strategy has taken a page from the book of its famous psychiatrist, Dr. Pavlov. Dr. Pavlov showed that dogs could be conditioned by interchanged adversity and aid to a state of neurosis. Was the same thing in store for the West? Dr. Sargent asked. Was it to take every Soviet blandishment so seriously, whether honeyed or ugly, as to become as unstable and frenzied as one of Pavlov's beasts?

Technical debate on the point we must leave to the social psychologists. But the West has an unfortunate habit of reacting frenziedly when the Red apparatus dictates—and approximately in the predictable [illegible]. When will the next [illegible] The very [illegible] of the answer ought to [illegible]